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DULL GATHERINGS ARE A COMMON DENOMINATOR

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MEETINGS

Say the words, "office meeting," and some workers dive for cover.

A survey of 1,216 US employees commissioned by Interactive Meeting Solutions, a high-tech meeting firm in California, reveals that 29 percent of workers attend three or more meetings per week and 34 percent say most are a "complete waste of time."

The random survey was conducted by Opinion Research Corp. of Princeton. The survey had a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percent.

The survey found that some workers bring their Palm Pilots and cellphones to meetings in order to liven up or escape a dull gathering. In all, 8 percent of the workers polled said they played electronic games at meetings; 14 percent of those workers were 18 to 24 years-old, IMS said. To escape a boring meeting, 5 percent of workers have had a friend or coworker give them a bogus page or cellphone call.

Said IMS president Chuck McPherson: "Handled incorrectly, the modern meeting has to rank as one of America's most excruciating and masochistic workplace experiences around. And, a bad meeting only creates yet another bad meeting."

The survey does offer some good news: Meetings at small companies tend to be more effective than those at bigger firms.

Small firms also hold fewer meetings. Thirty-seven percent of the workers at large companies attend three or more work-related meetings each week, compared to just 21 percent of the workers at small companies.

Sixty-seven percent of workers at large companies, compared to 52 percent at small firms, said their meetings could benefit from more honesty. Additionally, 35 percent of the workers at big firms said that if people were really truthful at a meeting, they would probably get fired. Only 24 percent of the workers at small firms said they'd get the ax for being honest.

Of those employed by big companies, 50 percent said they have attended a meeting where an employee in attendance fell asleep. Only 26 percent of people at small companies said they have seen a worker fall asleep.